

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman

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MEDIA NOTE

Joint Statement on the Start of Polling for the Southern Sudan Referendum

Following is the text of a joint statement by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Støre, and United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague on the start of polling for the Southern Sudan referendum.

Begin Text:

We welcome the start of polling today for the Southern Sudan Referendum. This represents a historic step towards completion of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We recognise the significant progress which has been made in recent weeks towards preparing for the referendum, including the successful completion of voter registration and other technical arrangements. We welcome the preliminary reports of the UN Secretary General's Panel on the Referenda in Sudan, Carter Center, European Union, and other international and domestic observation missions, which stated that arrangements are now in place that provide a firm foundation for a credible referendum to take place.

We call for all efforts to ensure peaceful and credible completion of the referendum process in a manner which reflects the will of the people of South Sudan. The Southern Sudan Referendum Commission and Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau have made enormous efforts under significant pressure and deserve to be commended for their work. We welcome the leadership shown by both Sudanese parties. President Bashir has made clear that his Government will respect the outcome of the Referendum. We welcome this commitment.

We are encouraged by the strong public commitments of both Presidents Bashir and Kiir to continue negotiations on post-referendum issues and to foster cooperation between the North and South regardless of the referendum result. We welcome these commitments as well as their pledge that the safety and security of all peoples in Sudan will be protected throughout this process. It is vital that these commitments are upheld.

The situation in Abyei remains of deep concern. We commend the people of Abyei for their patience in recent months. The outstanding issues must be resolved in a calm and measured manner and we emphasise again to both parties their responsibilities to urgently resolve the impasse. Clear communication is also vital to reassure the communities on the ground that their concerns will be addressed and underscore that the parties will reconvene negotiations at the earliest possible date. It is also of great importance that popular consultations in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states are conducted expeditiously and inclusively.

The work of the many domestic and international observation and monitoring groups is crucial. We welcome their continuing engagement. We also welcome the strong leadership by the United Nations Mission in Sudan. We will work closely with all international partners to maintain strong international support for the referendum process, and successful completion of the CPA.

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